

For the Love of advertising

Tim Love, Vice-Chairman, Omnicom, says new media complement the old, and that doomsday predictions about the latter haven't come true.



Tim Love, Vice-Chairman, Omnicom Group

Swetha Kannan

Tim Love of marketing communications conglomerate Omnicom has a really curious sounding designation. His business card says he is the Vice-Chairman, Omnicom Group, and CEO, Omnicom APIMA. What's APIMA, you wonder. Well, Love sure has a lovely explanation for that: AP stands for Asia Pacific. No surprises there. But in IMA lies the lovely story. "I is for India, which is a growing multi-cultural marketplace. With 1.2 billion people and its contribution to the world economy, India deserves to stand out. A is for Africa, in which Japan, China and India are investing. And finally, M is for the Middle East, which also should also be studied separately," says Love. Marketers need to get a "richer, deeper understanding" of the consumers in these markets to be successful, he adds. BrandLine caught up with Love for more on the Indian marketplace, the downturn, and what marketers should do to stay ahead. Excerpts:

How important is India in Omnicom's scheme of things?

We are looking at India for acquisitions in direct-to-consumer digital marketing, design consultancy, PR and branding. Omnicom wants to leapfrog in India and provide good advantage to its clients by beefing up the talent pool and filling gaps in its portfolio. India is a growing multicultural market place. Over the last five years, it has really grown. We want to be attached better to this rocket called India. Omnicom is a late mover in the market, unlike WPP. And we didn't come to India with big clients. But we now have some big accounts in Unilever (Lipton Tea), Procter & Gamble (with Gillette) and Johnson & Johnson. And we are looking for more business from these companies in India.

What kind of effect did the downturn have on the advertising industry and how is the climate now?

The advertising business is usually the first thing people cut because it takes a long time to realise its value. But I am very optimistic, because you can't cut your way to prosperity. You can only cut your way into being invisible. In the beginning of the economic downturn, it's always natural throughout history for people to cut back and hold their funding. What we are seeing is a return to engagement. When the economy was doing so well, brand managers had money to spend on Internet, TV and such. They were doing everything. Now, their bosses are saying, "You don't have to do everything. Just be more accountable."

Where is the media industry today headed? How should the industry respond to changing consumer trends?

The media industry is making a lot of progress. The industry has become more responsive and is having greater dialogue with consumers through new programming ideas. And there is a much faster feedback mechanism today. When the media voices a concern or makes a statement, they get pretty fast feedback. The interesting thing is that the difference between commentary and news is blurring. You do not know if it's commentary or news. The media is playing a kind of an activist role. And with the Internet, the news and information can be double-checked - you can ask somebody else's opinion of what you are saying. New media and technology is not a fad. We have children, we see it in them. This generation consumes media differently than we did. It's important that advertisers and those who work in communication find ways to work with new media. But traditional media do not go away, new media are added as part of the marketing mix. Some people predicted that when CNN came, people would stop going to movies theatres. They predicted that the magazine business would get hurt. But now there are more magazines and people are still going to the movies. Each new medium becomes an AND. Television AND radio AND Internet. It's kind of always been that way.

What should the print media do to sustain itself? Because many newspapers, especially in the West, are not doing so well ...

I think the print media has to pause and look at what value it brings. It's hard to do that when your success is based on classified ads. That's a stream of life support you don't want to walk away from. But then classified ads are becoming less effective because people can go on to the Internet, people are caught in a rip tide. You are swimming in the ocean not far from the beach and a tide comes and pulls you into the sea and lots of people drown, because you don't really feel it happening.

All of a sudden you want to swim to the shore and you swim in, but you are not moving. You panic and you swim even harder... and you get exhausted and drown. So, you must swim parallel to the shore. Relax.

The business environment of 2008 has been a rip tide for a lot of people. My advice is, relax and swim parallel to the shore. Look at what you are doing and innovate. Print's brand equity is trusted and immense. There's a difference between creativity and innovation. Creativity is the process of having an idea, creating an idea. But it isn't an innovation until it is realised, until it has an effect and moves something.

The Internet is also a visual medium like TV. So, how should television adapt itself to resonate better?

There is nothing more powerful than sight, sound and motion. So when TV and computer integrate (IPTV), it's going to be really interesting. Not only will you have the sensory experience, you will also be able to control, pause and locate, and ask questions and see things from different angles. You will have more choices.

What about product placements in movies and TV shows? Do they work?

If it is strategically right and not obtrusive, then it works.

What is your take on responsible green marketing?

Because we have greater access to information, you can find out about me without asking questions. In this environment, consumers are asking questions about the values of the brands they trade with. One of the things they are worried about is that they don't want their own loyalty to the brand ending up compromising the environment. That's why they are asking the brands what they are doing for environmental protection, for climate change, and so on. They don't expect perfection, they expect an answer from the brand that it is doing something. And consumers want to get involved with the brands doing good things.

How important is market research and analytics in today's context?

It's always been important. The issue is you still have to use judgement. The best analytics and data you can get. But you still need to combine that with judgement. There is no perfect foolproof research that tells you what to do. And there is no one perfect mantra for marketing. Clients would like that but it's not any different from trying to understand a person. A brand has a relationship with consumers and it takes commitment to want to understand consumers and listen to them.